

### ***Vietnam: Expatriate Support for Technology Transfer To Be Encouraged***

The director of Vietnam's liaison office for expatriate scientists has described the contributions made by overseas intellectuals to Vietnam's development to date and has announced new measures to accelerate technology transfers from Vietnamese intellectuals abroad.

Vietnam's government will embark on a broad-scale attempt to induce expatriate nationals to support the country's modernization through technology transfers, according to the government official charged with overseeing relations with Vietnam's expatriate intellectuals. Writing in the February 2003 issue of Hanoi's *Tap Chi Hoat Dong Khoa Hoc*, a monthly magazine of science and technology, Nguyen Van Pham, Director of the Department of Economics, Science, and Technology Relations of the Foreign Affairs Ministry's Committee for Overseas Vietnamese, described the "huge potential" of the expatriate community to further state-defined development goals in high-tech industry.

Nguyen contrasted the lack of exportable wealth of overseas Vietnamese, compared to other ethnic communities of longer standing, with the rich intellectual resources of his "fellow countrymen" abroad. Some 300,000 of the 2.7 million Vietnamese living overseas have university degrees or high-level technical skills, Nguyen said, with 200,000 of them living in the United States. Although some still harbor ill feelings toward Vietnam, this attitude is changing, owing to measures taken by the Party and government in recent years to facilitate interaction between Vietnam and its expatriate community, Nguyen asserted.

Nguyen noted that in 2002, 380,000 overseas Vietnamese traveled to Vietnam, compared to 152,672 in 1993. Contributions by expatriate intellectuals have also been increasing, he indicated. After 1975, a small number of intellectuals began returning to Vietnam on an individual basis to share their technical expertise by teaching and participating in research, Nguyen observed. Others have acted as intermediaries to bring in foreign experts for cooperative projects or helped by funding scholarship programs, investing in new industries, and "supporting Vietnam's international cooperative programs."

Nguyen described these expatriates as "well trained" with access to the "latest scientific and technological achievements." He said that many have high positions in "foreign labs, universities, large companies, and international organizations, as well as connections with S&T institutions in various countries." They are active in most fields, he said, and in all areas needed for Vietnam's development. Most are 25-40 years of age, "deeply attached" to the motherland, and sympathetic toward its efforts to develop. Many have "built bridges" to help Vietnam assimilate foreign technology and "have actively participated in the process of globalization." About 200 such expatriate intellectuals from the United States, Japan, and other countries are invited annually by different companies and organizations to work in Vietnam, he reported. Nguyen argued that these numbers will grow as the expatriate community matures.

In the meantime, Nguyen asserted, more positive measures are needed inasmuch as the contributions garnered to date have not led to "breakthroughs or fundamental changes" in high-tech disciplines such as information science, telecommunications, or new materials "where Vietnam has little expertise." Hence the Party and government must "push and encourage"

expatriate intellectuals to "transfer their knowledge and technology, take the lead in establishing relationships between universities and research institutes at home and abroad, and bring advanced, state-of-the-art scientific accomplishments into the country," he said.

Nguyen described three "measures" his office is planning to promote support from overseas Vietnamese scientists and engineers. While continuing existing programs to bring expatriate intellectuals to Vietnam, his office will (1) study proposals to build a high-tech industrial zone in Vietnam exclusively for expatriates; (2) seek out leading expatriate intellectuals in fields important to Vietnam and invite them to work "cooperatively or as advisors"; and (3) make greater efforts to offer returning intellectuals fair treatment and financial incentives, such as tax breaks for investors and subsidies for their projects.

In addition, Nguyen noted that his office manages the United Nations Development Program's (UNDP) "Transfer of Knowledge Through Expatriate Nationals" (TOKTEN) project to bring ethnic Vietnamese intellectuals back to Vietnam for limited periods of time, typically 4-8 weeks. Some 40 such specialists were selected between 1989 and 2000. TOKTEN, he noted, was originally administered in Vietnam by the Ministry of Science and Technology but was transferred to the Committee for Overseas Vietnamese in 2001. Nguyen acknowledged that the project has run into financial difficulties, which his office is trying to resolve.

Further information on TOKTEN in Vietnam was available on a UNDP-affiliated Web site ([www.tokten-vn/org.vn](http://www.tokten-vn/org.vn)) as of 29 March 2003. According to the Web site, only 20 TOKTEN consultants were placed in Vietnam between 1990 and 1992, mainly in the areas of science and technology. Receiving organizations reportedly included the Institute for S&T Strategic Studies, the Institute for Computer Science, and Hanoi Polytechnic. The site also provided a link to the Committee for Overseas Vietnamese Web site (<http://www.vitrinet.com.vn/cosv>), which was not operating as of 31 March.